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# PROBATION

Issue 21: September 2021

*Quarterly*

## Looking to the future for Probation

### ***What does unification of the Probation Service mean for race equality?***

*Unification of probation through the lens of race equality*

### ***Assessing the resettlement reforms under Transforming Rehabilitation***

*Key findings from research on resettlement policy and practice*

### ***Post-unification priorities for probation***

*Former practitioners' perspectives*

# PROBATION *Quarterly*

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# SUBMIT AN ARTICLE FOR THE NEXT EDITION OF THE PQ?

Probation Quarterly publishes short articles of 500 - 1500 words which are of interest to practitioners and researchers in public, private or voluntary sector work with people on probation and victims. These articles can be about:

- the activities of the Probation Institute.
- news about the work of your organisation or project.
- reports from special events, seminars, meetings or conferences.
- summaries of your own completed research. (Note: we do not publish requests for research participants)
- brief reviews of books or research reports that have caught your eye.
- thought pieces where you can reflect on an issue that concerns you.

The articles need to be well-written, informative and engaging but don't need to meet the academic standards for a peer-reviewed journal. The editorial touch is 'light' and we can help you to develop your article if that is appropriate. If you have an idea for a suitable article, let me know what you have in mind and I can advise you on how to proceed. Please also read our [language policy](#) which asks all contributors to avoid stigmatising language.'

## Disclaimer

All contributors must adhere to the [Probation Institute Code of Ethics](#) but the views expressed are their own and not necessarily those of the Probation Institute.

## Jake Phillips

Editor, Probation Quarterly

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# Hello

I am delighted to publish Issue 21 of *Probation Quarterly*. This is my first issue fully in charge as editor and I hope you find the articles in this issue as interesting and relevant to practice as I do. The last few months have been important in the world of probation with a key milestone in the post-TR unification of CRCs and the NPS taking place on 25 June. It seemed to me - looking in from the outside - that this event was accompanied by a full-on awareness raising effort with regional probation directors reporting on Twitter from Unpaid Work sites on the day itself and other media engagements occurring in subsequent weeks. As someone who has long believed that probation deserves more media and public attention this was good to see, although some of the language around introducing chain gangs and probation practitioners as 'crime fighters' seemed rather incongruent with what I see and hear when conducting research in and around the world of probation. That said, it is useful to be reminded of the power that the Probation Service has over the people it subjects to supervision and tweets from the Ministry of Justice served to illustrate that nicely, if unintentionally. These efforts to position probation in the limelight culminated in the first ever celebration of '[probation day](#)' on 21 August,

marking the date on which the [Probation of Offenders Act](#) was passed in 1907. Probation day events seemed to be more balanced and truer to practitioners' values than the punitivism of those MoJ tweets and I hope we continue to see such portrayals of probation in the future.

On a related note, I have spent some time in the last three months thinking about the use of language in probation, especially when it comes to the way I (i.e. someone without lived experience of systems of punishment) refer to people under supervision. As part of this I have developed a short guide to language that I am asking all PQ contributors to adhere to. You can [read the full policy here](#) but, briefly, I am asking writers to use person-centred language as much as possible and to avoid stigmatising words such as 'offender' which does little more than describe *what* people are rather than describe who they are. I would like to thank David and Jahmaine (members of the Revolving Doors Lived Experience Team) and Philip Mullen (Research Manager at Revolving Doors) for their help with developing this guidance. If you have any thoughts on it, please do get in touch.

In this issue, Laura Frampton's research on probation practitioners' attitudes towards working with so-called 'paedophile hunters' raises yet more questions about the use of language, a theme which is also relevant to Melanie Jameson and Ian Merrill's articles both of which focus on hidden vulnerabilities such as Specific Learning Disabilities and low literacy levels. The issue also includes an article by Jason Tizedes focusing on his work in the field of technology in corrections, ever important in the context of recovery from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Sticking with the pandemic, I am pleased to include an infographic detailing key findings from a joint study by Revolving Doors and the University of Lincoln about experiences of accessing healthcare in the pandemic whilst under probation supervision. Finally, Matt Cracknell and Natalie Rutter outline key findings from their doctoral studies focusing on, respectively, resettlement and bereavement.

This issue also includes a themed section focusing on the process of unification with contributions from policy, practice and academia. Firstly, Jim Barton provides a first-hand account of leading the process and then Sam Ainslie considers what the future holds for different models of probation. Shadae Cazeau explores what unification means for race equality and former practitioners Daniella Nudd and Deena Parma reflect on their experiences of practice and unification. Finally, Jonathan Hussey considers the future of probation through the lens of digital interventions.

Together, these articles suggest that unification is a step in the right direction and that there is considerable potential for improving the way probation services function in England and Wales. However, the jury is still out on exactly whether and how the aspirations in the Target Operating Model, the new commissioning structure, technological developments and a concerted recruitment strategy will result in real benefits for staff in probation and, crucially, people on probation.

The themed section in the next issue will focus on race, racial inequality and the relevance of the BLM movement for probation practice. However, I have struggled to find academic researchers conducting work in this area; a worrying situation considering what we know about the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on people from minoritised racial and ethnic groups. So, I would like to finish this introduction with a request for contributions from researchers working in this area, as well as a clarion call to others to do more research focusing on the issue of race in probation.

As ever, I am open to receiving ideas for contributions from academics, policymakers, practitioners and charities - please just get in touch if you have something that you think will be of interest to our readers.

**Jake Phillips**

Editor, Probation Quarterly

# What's going on at the Probation Institute?

## An update from Helen Schofield, Acting CEO.

This has been a busy Summer with some major changes, important reports and the justice system emerging from the lockdown restrictions. The Unification of the Probation Service on 25 June is a date that will be remembered in the history of Probation. In this issue of the PQ we publish some initial perspectives on unification. A particular concern for the Probation Institute is that the new arrangements for partnership with the voluntary and community sector - commissioned services under the dynamic framework - will not engage the breadth of smaller voluntary and community sector organisations that are widely needed to meet the needs of probation service users.

In his [Review of the Probation Dynamic Framework](#), published on the CLINKS website, Richard Oldfield (founder of Oldfield Partners, an asset management firm, trustee of the Prince's Trust and Amber Foundation) makes strong recommendations for change including:

- to encourage Regional Probation Directors to make frequent use of grants rather than contracts;
- to require lead bidders for contracts and grants to use specified percentages in the funding of SMEs and small/medium-sized VCSEs; and
- simplification of contract requirements and documentation.

These recommendations have been welcomed by the Director General of Probation Amy Rees. Over the Summer we have also seen two important publications on drug use and drug treatment. [Part Two of the Dame Carol Black Review](#) and the HMIP Report on the ["Thematic Inspection of community-based drug treatment and recovery work with people on probation"](#). Both paint an alarming picture of failing systems and lack of provision. Dame Carol Black call for funding

of over £552 million to address the required services.

The Probation Institute has funding to develop an independent elearning package - "Understanding Drug Use and Treatment" which will be accessible to all, in probation, the prisons and wider agencies, on our website from the end of this year. Support in developing this from probation practitioners, the prison service, people with lived experience and from the voluntary and community sector - is much appreciated.

In recent months we have reviewed three important reports on race equality in the Probation Institute - the HMI Prisons Thematic Inspection of ["Minority Ethnic Prisoners Experience of Resettlement Planning"](#), the HMIP Probation Thematic Inspection of ["Race Equality in Probation"](#), and most recently the review of the ["McPherson Report 22 years on"](#). We are looking at ways in which the Probation Institute can help to respond effectively to the challenges presented by these reports which are each very concerning. Whilst we had hoped to hold a Research Event on Race Equality this Autumn still looking to identify sufficient suitable, effective research.

In August we completed our own independent Review of Professional Registration for Probation, Rehabilitation and Resettlement looking forward at the role of an Independent Regulatory Body post-unification. This report will be published in early September.

Our website [www.probation-institute.org](http://www.probation-institute.org) is increasingly a useful source of reports, research, useful publications - a good place to start if you are looking for a report. We also use [LinkedIn](#) regularly to build up resources for an audience interested in developments in Probation, Rehabilitation and Resettlement.

# Exploring Practitioner Attitudes of 'Paedophile Hunting' Groups

Laura Frampton explores some of the issues in relation to managing the risks that arise as a result of 'paedophile hunting'.



Both in the UK and internationally research on 'paedophile hunting' activity is limited. This lack of research has serious implications for policy, and that is problematic given the potential consequences of this type of activity on community-based risk management. This research - which you can read in full [here](#) - was designed to consider both public and practitioner attitudes towards paedophile hunters, as well as the implications of the activity on risk management. The term 'paedophile hunter' is problematic ethically, because *paedophile* implies that those who commit child sexual offences are innately predatory, and *hunting* implies an activity targeted at animals, rather than people (Frampton, 2021). Despite these inaccuracies, 'paedophile hunter' was the term used most commonly by participants and is therefore the term used throughout this article.

In this research, a mixed methods approach was utilised, comprising 28 in-depth qualitative interviews with Police Offender Managers and Probation Officers, and a large-scale online survey to generate data on public perceptions. Semi-structured interviews with practitioners generated rich and illuminating material and it is these interviews that I focus on in this article. The four key themes that emerged from talking with practitioners were: emergence and prevalence, resources, safeguarding and risk, and attitudes.

Social media was an area that was discussed widely across many of the interviews, because of the prevalence of 'paedophile hunting' videos across these outlets. Facebook was mentioned most often by participants, followed by YouTube.



**Laura Frampton**

Former Practitioner and Recent Graduate of the University of Portsmouth

All but two police officers made some reference to professionalising 'paedophile hunting' groups. This means that the groups would formally work together with police. Some officers appeared in support of this, whilst others were more cautious and raised the interesting question of whether in professionalising these groups, the police would also have to make them accountable to the same laws and procedures as the statutory agencies currently undertaking the work. It was interesting to note that fewer probation officers made reference to professionalising 'paedophile hunting' groups. When they did mention it, they were less ambiguous and felt that the work being undertaken by 'paedophile hunting' groups, should be left to the police. Pertinent questions around the suitability or resilience of members of the public to carry out work of this kind were also highlighted, and there were also several references made to community policing.

Whilst probation officers did not mention community policing specifically, police officers did. In one police interview, an interesting observation was made regarding community policing and other types of offending. The suggestion here was that engaging communities with some types of offending behaviour was happening regularly, but that there were different expectations when considering community policing and offences of a sexual nature. This demonstrated that some practitioners view 'paedophile hunters' as unique because of the moral and ethical dilemma surrounding the activity. This is a particularly pertinent finding because it adds to the debate about suitable punishments and effective risk assessment, particularly of people convicted of sexual offences (Hill & Wall, 2015).

With regard to risk, police officers were more focused on the victims of child sexual abuse. This could be an indication of a more victim centred approach, or of a different understanding between the two organisations, of who a victim is.

When referring to risk police officers referred to a different type of risk to that being referred to by probation officers. Police officers often spoke of the *risk posed by paedophile hunting activity* in terms of the risk to possible victims of child sexual abuse, whilst probation officers spoke

more commonly of the *risk posed by paedophile hunting activity* to the individual being targeted by the 'paedophile hunting' group. The question of who the victims of 'paedophile hunters' really are, was beyond the scope of this research, but is an important consideration for future research in this area. Even so, it demonstrates a need for clarity when discussing this activity in the context of criminal justice work.

Risk of harm and reducing re-offending was important to both sets of practitioners, and they described the need to ensure that the methods utilised to assess risk were meaningful in the first instance. Recently, relationships between the police and the probation service have changed dramatically. Close working relationships between the agencies have not always been easy, raising problems around information sharing, conflicting objectives, different ways of working, contrasting attitudes towards offenders and cultural tensions (Mawby & Worrall, 2011). The results of this research show that 'victim' and 'child' are very commonly the key concern of both sets of practitioners. Irrespective of the differing constructs of a 'victim', this research demonstrates that for both police and probation practitioners, the issue of the risk posed by 'paedophile hunting' activity has serious practice implications.

As a result of the research, 3 key recommendations for probation and police services have been made:

1. Design and deliver training for police and probation practitioners to understand 'paedophile hunting' groups and the vigilantism to activism continuum.
2. Practitioner attitudes and opinions should be collected on a larger scale, and from a wider geographical area, to help structure and influence 'paedophile hunter' policy and the associated training.
3. Ensure a Criminal Justice System wide criminological input that focuses on understanding 'paedophile hunting' activity, the vigilantism to activism continuum victims and the associated offending/offenders. (Frampton, 2021).

These recommendations reflect the learning from the research and support practitioners working with people convicted of a sex offence in the community who, on an individual level, are also mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles themselves. The recommendations do not advocate that current policies and procedures should not be adhered to, as they are the current legislative structure through which criminal justice work has to be conducted. However, what is required is recognition of the uniqueness and complexities of the work that these professionals are undertaking, balanced with their own human experiences, morals and values.

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# Remotely Managing Compliance, Accountability & Communications with Criminal Justice Involved Persons in the Age of COVID and Beyond

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Jason Tizedes uses his expertise and existing research to consider how probation providers might implement remote supervision technologies in the aftermath of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

If the last 18 months have taught us anything, it is that nothing is predictable. If someone had predicted that the entire criminal justice world would be upended by something that is 100nm (0.0001mm) in size, they would have been dismissed as mad. The pandemic has shown criminal justice agencies worldwide the importance of being prepared for anything to happen, and the value of technologies to create agile, effective change.

But the last 18 months could be viewed as a blueprint, rather than a setback. There are a number of reasons that we need to explore Remote Client Management within the criminal justice ecosystem, the obvious being the response to a global pandemic. No matter the cause, humankind did—as it does very often when faced with challenges—adapt. Our lounge chairs and kitchen tables made for new office spaces, while technology became mandatory for maintaining community safety, versus a luxury. Suddenly, services like Zoom®, Microsoft Teams®, GoToMeeting®, and other video conferencing tools were bombarded with demand and quickly became standard business tools worldwide. In probation, treatment, pretrial, and other community supervision programs, online services such as video conferencing, texting applications, and remote workstations with VPN connections became an integral part of our lives, both personally and professionally, and many of them are here to stay.

### Remote Client Management Technologies

Perhaps one of the most adopted forms of technology in criminal justice in the US over the last 18 months has been Remote Client



**Jason Tizedes**

Vice President Total Court Services, the U.S. Midwest’s largest full continuum provider of alcohol and electronic monitoring, substance testing, and offender management solutions.

Management tools. These typically take the form of intuitive software platforms and simple-to-use smartphone applications that allow case managers and supervised individuals to communicate regularly. In the United States, the demand for these platforms increased 300% during the pandemic. Now, even as restrictions ease, most courts and agencies have permanently adopted these Remote Client Management solutions, due to their ease of use and the conservation of staff resources—in particular for lower-risk offenders.

While widespread adoption of participant-facing technologies, such as smartphone applications, is recent, the platforms are nearly ten years old. Like other digital tools, it took the pandemic for government agencies to see widespread adoption. While the implementation of new technologies and systemic change in processes and procedures can be slow and difficult for government entities to implement, the pandemic removed many of the usual barriers to change, created a compelling need for technology to meet the lapses created by the inability to meet and manage participants in-person, and highlighted the value of these technology solutions. Currently, there are roughly two dozen companies that offer a Remote Client Management solution. The providers of these tools are as diverse as the populations they serve, and on the face of it, the focus of each of these solutions is the same, but not all are created equal.

Based on two decades of career experience covering criminal justice and software development, I have identified four important things to consider when reviewing Remote Client Management solutions for probation providers:

- **No single solution on the market solves every problem.** Not every solution available will have everything you want, but several solutions will have everything you need. It is important, when creating program requirements, to distinguish between Needs and Nice-to-Haves, which ensures you focus on the specifications that will best align with your program's specific situation. It is also important to recognize that these solutions do not replace case management, physical staff, or even picking up the telephone and talking to a supervised person. Rather,

they are useful, supplemental tools to treatment, monitoring, and community supervision programs. They can improve the user and agent experience, enhance monitoring through better communication with supersized persons, and cost-effectively layer in supervision for lower-level participants that might not otherwise have a monitoring solution of appropriate intensity.

- **Ensure the solution includes the standard features at a minimum, then compare the more advanced functionality.** Most platforms on the market have features like event reminders, messaging tools, and ways for supervised individuals to submit remote reports as standard features. If a solution does not address these basic needs, move on to the next option. Beyond the basics, there are also features that you may not have thought about, but would add value to your supervision program, such as the ability to message multiple participants at one time, the option to verify an individual's location on a schedule or on-demand, or an ability to operate substance testing programs. Additionally, it is important to know the provider's track record for development. Do they seek input from courts and agencies in order to make improvements? How responsive are they to the needs of the field? What are their development plans and timeline? Do not only focus on what the provider has now, but look at their future plans and their track record for getting features built. This is an extremely important component to the decision-making process. Like any other technology, Remote Client Management tools will continue to evolve.

- **The solution must have a way of matching functionality to participants' needs.** Many solutions on the market try to build value by cramming all the features into a single, one-size-fits-all price. But what if you do not need every feature? Or perhaps more importantly, what if you need to cater to varying types of supervised individuals and risk levels? Reviewing a solution that considers what you already know—that not all criminal justice involved persons are alike—is a valuable feature to have in a platform. Importantly, the platform should have an “every participant” strategy, where lack of accessibility to a smartphone should not exclude the criminal justice involved person from being able to participate. Having a web interface or even a phone-in system can be valuable alternate accessibility points. An ability to customize the experience and supervision level for each individual has proven time and again to be the best avenue for positive outcomes.
- **The focus should always be on improving outcomes for supervised persons.** A recent study found that simply sending text message reminders to individuals about court dates reduced failures to appear by 21%.<sup>1</sup> Focusing technology on those participants that already embrace it can help with communication. Research shows that ownership of smartphones is directly related to age, with 95% of 18-29-year-olds owning one.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, education

and income also influence smartphone ownership, with more educated and higher earning individuals being more likely to own a smartphone. Interestingly, the way younger individuals perceive electronic communication is far different than those of older populations. For instance, it was found that 50% of 18-24-year-olds found a text message just as meaningful as a phone call and that 90% of text messages are read within three minutes of receipt.<sup>3</sup> Keeping our focus on improving the outcomes for supervised persons must involve adapting to modern communication strategies.

Truly the only thing for certain about the future of criminal justice is there will always be a need for community supervision, regardless of economic, social, or other external circumstances. Technology is becoming more accessible, and as such, courts and agencies need to be tuned into those changing trends. Being uncomfortable with change often prevents agencies from experiencing breakthroughs in ways of monitoring and communicating with those under supervision. Revolutionary, low-cost solutions are available now and those involved in the system need as many tools as possible to succeed. This last year demonstrated that courts and agencies can pivot and adapt to uncertain times. There is some evidence to suggest that these tools can impact caseloads in a positive way but more data is needed here. Nonetheless, the momentum created by the pandemic needs to be harnessed through the further adoption and evaluation of these new, cost effective technologies.

<sup>1</sup> Behavioral nudges reduce failure to appear for court | A. Fishbane et al., Science

<sup>2</sup> Mobile Fact Sheet | [www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org)

<sup>3</sup> Mind-Blowing Statistics that Prove the Value of Texting for Service Brands | [www.kipsu.com](http://www.kipsu.com)

# Probation and Covid-19

In this infographic researchers from Revolving Doors and the University of Lincoln outline the findings from their research into the experiences of accessing healthcare whilst under probation supervision. By shedding light on the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the research includes some highly pertinent recommendations for probation providers in relation to healthcare and supervision more broadly. With implications for probation both during and after recovering from the pandemic this research should be read widely.



## Probation and Covid-19



Many people under probation supervision are in poor health compared to the general population. Health-related factors, such as problematic substance use and mental ill-health can be root causes of crime and re-offending. Probation staff work with health and social care partners to help people on probation to access support and improve their health.

During the pandemic, face-to-face probation appointments were reduced, and replaced with doorstep visits, and contact via telephone and online platforms such as Microsoft Teams to keep people safe. Access to healthcare services (e.g. GPs) also changed to be more online/over the telephone.






We wanted to know what impact the response to the pandemic had on:

- Probation's health-related work,
- The lived experience of accessing support for health issues whilst engaging with probation, and
- Partnership working and pathways into healthcare for people on probation

## What we did...



We analysed 27 open surveys of frontline probation staff working in 10 National Probation Service Regions and a Community Rehabilitation Company.

These explored their perceptions of the impact of the response to Covid-19 on their health-related practice with people under supervision.

We conducted and analysed in-depth interviews with 11 people that were engaging with probation during the pandemic.

These explored the impact of changes on their health, access to healthcare, and experience of working with probation or health services to improve their health during the pandemic.



We shared findings with probation health leads and participants in the study at an online workshop and conducted follow-up calls to add detail to our findings.



We made recommendations around how to minimise negative impacts and maximise and share good practice.

## We found that...



Face-to-face supervision is important to build rapport, identify and address health issues, and to monitor and manage associated risk. It is also needed for some types of work e.g. around domestic violence.

Some people prefer face-to-face contact with probation and with healthcare.



Remote supervision should not be used on its own but can usefully complement face-to-face appointments.

It can be easier for people to attend probation appointments this way if they are ill, working, or have family responsibilities. It also saves travel time and costs and avoids the stigma of attending a probation office.



Not everyone has access to technology like a smartphone, or phone credit to contact probation and healthcare.

Not everyone understands how to use technology.

Some people's use is restricted through their licence conditions.



Considering people's preferences about how to attend (where this is possible) may encourage them to view probation as supportive, improve their engagement, and encourage open conversations about health.



Access to some healthcare has been delayed, disrupted, or was often only possible by phone or online during the pandemic. This has had a negative impact on the health of people engaging with probation. It has been hard to provide Community Sentence Treatment Requirements.



There have been some beneficial innovations, including using Microsoft Teams to improve inter-agency communication, but probation staff have needed to do extra work to provide additional support due to gaps in health service provision. This could lead to burnout in the long-term.

## We recommend...

- 1 Decisions around the use of blended probation supervision (a mix of face-to-face and remote contact) should be made on an individual basis. There is no one size fits all approach. Staff should consider a range of factors such as level of risk, digital capability, health needs, whether someone engages well over the phone, and the individual's preferences. The impact of blended supervision should continue to be evaluated.
- 2 The probation service should provide digital skills training and support to access appropriate technology to ensure that the digital divide does not further disadvantage people in accessing support from probation and healthcare providers.
- 3 Ensuring that probation staff have access to practical and emotional support through supervision and wellbeing services to prevent burnout, particularly as the consistency of relationships was emphasised as critical by people engaging with probation to their rehabilitation.
- 4 Further research into and evaluation of the outcomes of innovations that have happened during the pandemic and that staff have suggested may be beneficial to pilot in the future such as peer mentors and strategic health roles within probation.

### For more detailed study findings please see:

<https://probation-and-covid19.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/>

This summary was co-produced by staff from the University of Lincoln and Revolving Doors Agency, and individuals with lived experience of the criminal justice system (Jahmaine, Gareth and Nadia).

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# Assessing the resettlement reforms under Transforming Rehabilitation

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Matt Cracknell presents key findings from his research on resettlement policy and practice in England and Wales.



## Introduction

Introduced as a part of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* (TR) reforms, the Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) 2014 extended post-release supervision to the short sentence population, a cohort who have historically been neglected in penal discourse. The ORA 2014 reforms meant that everyone released from custody on a short sentence receives 12-months post-release supervision in the community. In this article I present some of the findings from my PhD which I completed in July 2020. The main aim of the thesis was to explore how resettlement is enacted by practitioners and experienced by individuals serving short sentences. I interviewed 35 practitioners and service users in one local resettlement prison and one CRC office, in order to gain a rich qualitative perspective of how the ORA 2014 reforms were enacted on the ground.

This extension of post-release support has occurred in three ways. Firstly, 'local' Category B prisons were re-designated as 'resettlement' prisons. This policy was intended to result in individuals serving short sentences "working towards their rehabilitation" from the moment they were imprisoned and being provided with a "tailored package of supervision and support" in the form of through the gate resettlement services (Ministry of Justice, 2013). Secondly, support begun in prison would continue seamlessly through-the-gate and into the community. The needs of the individual would be identified in prison and then communicated to a dedicated CRC practitioner, who would put the resettlement plan into action. Once released into



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the community under licence, the officer would undertake regular supervision sessions with the individual to provide support and guidance in the first crucial weeks post-release. The third element of this sentence is post-sentence supervision (PSS). With the expressed aim of rehabilitation, PSS is facilitated by a specialist worker from a third-sector organisation, who has access to a range of specialist providers. This final part of the sentence should allow the service user to consolidate their resettlement plans as they reintegrate back into the community.

## The resettlement prison

Institutional barriers in the resettlement prison primarily concerned the difficulties of overseeing the pre-existing demands of the 'local' functions of facilitating court transfers and managing remand prisoners, alongside the nascent ideals of providing resettlement support. Practitioners felt the prison was not sufficiently equipped to provide this additional support. This resulted in prisoners becoming trapped within a prison that was unable to meet their needs. Furthermore, prison officers failed to recognise resettlement work as a core part of their working remit. Instead, resettlement was largely understood as a technical process to be administered by a specific department, rather than through a whole prisons approach. This indicated a failure to alter the role of officers beyond core security concerns.

For practitioners with a resettlement focused role, temporal constraints hampered the ability to provide meaningful support. Although practitioners tried their best, the limited time to provide resettlement support inhibited their ability to facilitate meaningful change. Instead, resettlement planning was either not done, or completed to a superficial standard, and became viewed as a box-ticking exercise rather than a tool to engage meaningfully with an individual. Furthermore, austerity measures had affected prison staffing levels and created a pervasive culture of ambivalence and acceptance of underperformance within the prison. These political-economic barriers had also impacted upon the prisons' ability to provide effective pathway services. Combined, these issues undermined the ideals of the resettlement prison and the ability to support individuals as they transitioned through the gate.

## Through-the-gate transition to the community and the licence period

The impacts of these barriers continued into the community. The primary institutional barrier for CRC practitioners concerned large caseload numbers. This meant that officers were not encouraged, or able, to undertake prison visits and establish working relationships pre-release. Service users were often not allocated pre-release, meaning the initial appointment was often very brief and uninformative. Once allocated, officers employed a model of allocating service users to pathway services, such as housing, or employment advisors, encouraging an 'arm's-length' distant approach. However, due to austerity measures, many services were often poor and unable to help service users overcome problems related to housing or accessing benefits. Temporal barriers also persisted, as the limited time individuals had to serve on licence often meant that supervision was very perfunctory and something to 'get service users through' and onto PSS as painlessly as possible.

Under these challenging circumstances, practitioners had a more pragmatic attitude towards recalling individuals back to custody, seeing it as an inevitable part of the job for such a 'problematic' cohort. Often service users were bifurcated between those deemed willing and able to change, and those that were not.

However, research on the through-the-gate elements of the reforms (CJJl, 2016; Taylor et al., 2017) and PSS (HMIP, 2019; Cracknell, 2020) are highly critical of the support provided to individuals on short sentences. My argument here is that there is a disconnect between TR policy rhetoric and the reality of practice on the ground which is caused by a set of interconnected institutional, temporal and political-economic barriers that practitioners struggle to overcome. I conclude by briefly looking at the incoming resettlement policy - offender manager in custody (OMiC) - evaluating the extent to which this latest resettlement policy will be able to address any of the current concerns related to resettlement for the short sentence population.

### Post-sentence supervision

Staff administering the last element of the short sentence - PSS - also experienced a number of barriers to providing effective support. There were ambiguities over the transfer process and eligibility criteria for PSS, and many practitioners experienced poor communication with third-sector staff, leading to an antagonistic relationship on the ground.

Furthermore, the expressed aim of rehabilitation was undermined by the same insufficient austerity-hit pathways that CRC practitioners faced. Third-sector staff felt that they were placed in a very difficult position, as the cases

they took on had received little pre-existing resettlement support, yet were charged with starting again with the service user. This meant there was a lack of continuity and efficient communication at all levels of the short sentence, encompassing prison, through to the community. Service users experienced the short sentence as three disparate elements; where resettlement work became stalled at every juncture of the sentence and then needlessly repeated. This was experienced as a negative pass-the-parcel process, with the individual repeatedly moved onto different practitioners and agencies throughout the sentence.

### Conclusion: resettlement policy post-TR

As the failed TR model has now come to an end and probation services are re-unified, this provides an opportunity for an improved resettlement service. The main new initiative involves the OMiC model, which combines offender management work with resettlement planning - hoping to end duplication between these two functions (HMPPS, 2020). Most significantly, it places more emphasis on prisons, making them responsible for resettlement work, only handing over responsibility shortly before release. However, with prisons still struggling with the impacts of austerity, it is questionable if they are best placed to facilitate resettlement.

In the community, specialised short sentence teams will be arranged in each probation area, these dedicated teams will aim to reduce the disruption caused by short periods of incarceration. This is potentially a welcome step towards addressing the difficulties this group often face. Despite some calls for its abolition, PSS will continue.

However, this element of the sentence will now be fully supervised by probation practitioners rather than third-sector organisations, hopefully aiding continuity in the supervisory relationship. Furthermore, greater flexibility has been bought into the supervision arrangements for individuals when they reach this stage of the short sentence such as removing the monthly minimum contact requirement.

Many of these changes cautiously indicate some progress in the resettlement support for individuals subject to short sentences. However, to improve resettlement outcomes for individuals, it is imperative that the government increases financial support in the important areas directly related to resettlement, such as benefits, housing and mental health support, to help individuals integrate back into society. Furthermore, prison and probation staff need to be provided the space and time to work effectively with individuals and build a trusting professional relationship. Without these changes, I fear that OMiC will fare little better than the failed TR reforms.

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# Hidden Vulnerabilities

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Melanie Jameson discusses what we know about Specific Learning Disabilities and the implications for probation practice.

All my working life I have been concerned with a population that is worryingly over-represented in the criminal justice system (CJS). I am referring to individuals with Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Dyscalculia, a family of conditions previously known as 'Specific Learning Difficulties' (SpLDs). Dyscalculia is the least known, encompassing difficulties with numbers in all settings: time-telling, money, measurements, recalling numerical personal information, retaining pin numbers, dates expressed as numbers etc.

The somewhat outdated SpLD terminology brings out the fact that all the above are associated with difficulties in 'specific' areas, whereas other aspects of functioning may operate well. Asperger Syndrome is sometimes included because, again, the associated difficulties are 'specific', in contrast to the pervasive learning difficulties often associated with autism. It is now well established that SpLDs often overlap, with each other, causing a complex combination of challenges for the individual.

The impact of these conditions and the prevalence of SpLDs are what makes this an important issue for people who work in the CJS. Government-funded research in 2005 established that almost 20% of prisoners are affected by one or more SpLD, to the extent that they would struggle to cope with education and training programmes.<sup>1</sup> This is twice the rate of the general population.<sup>2</sup>

How might this over-representation have come about? A possible pathway was articulated by a magistrate and Dyslexia expert:



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*"When dyslexics experience lack of appropriate support from their early years, this can lead to poor reading, writing and number skills; low self-esteem; frustration, anger, truanting or exclusion from school and poor employment prospects ...all of which play their part in the climate of offending."*

Nowadays terminology has evolved away from Specific Learning Difficulties - a term more prevalent in school settings. Instead, you will come across 'Neurodiversity', somewhat confusingly because we all think differently and could be described as 'neuro-diverse'. The Aspergers community in the United States popularised 'Neuro-Diversity', which then serves as a useful contrast with the more common Neuro-Typical mindset. However, in the UK at least, 'Neurodiversity' has also come to include Learning Disabilities (characterised by impaired intelligence and poor social functioning) and autism, as well as Acquired Brain Injury. My focus in this article is solely on Dyslexia and the associated 'specific' conditions.

<sup>1</sup> <https://alippe.eu/documents/HiddenDisabilities.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Incidence of Hidden Disabilities in the Prison Population (March 2005) Learning & Skills Council and Dyslexia Action'

Given their prevalence, it is surprising that so little guidance is available for CJS practitioners – unlike Learning Disabilities, which affect far fewer people. In court, for example, the defendants I support are rarely seen as vulnerable or disabled, although their combination of difficulties may often amount to a disability as defined by the Equality Act. This is an issue that will be picked up later in the article. The following extract describes the experience of a man with Dyslexia struggling during a court hearing. None of his problems had been picked up in the pre-sentence report.

*I experienced total disorientation. I could hear things going on but nothing seemed to register or make sense. Important questions were garbled and distorted or didn't even register. I was asked to recall events of several years ago in detail. The order of how I recalled the events was vital to my case. However, I was unable to access my memories of the events clearly and what I did manage to remember I was unable to express in a chronological order or with any clarity.*

So what provisions are available for this group, whose vulnerability may not be obvious? The starting point is the definition of disability in the Equality Act 2010, namely: 'a person has a disability if he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day to day activities.'

'Long-term' is given with neuro-developmental conditions ('Acquired Dyslexia' does exist, but is

rare). But what about substantial and adverse? The combination of difficulties, when established by testing, may well amount to a disability. Typical impacts, which vary from person to person and in their severity, can be summarised as follows. Even high-performing individuals will experience many of these:

- Slow speed of information processing, a 'penny-dropping' delay.
- Poor short-term memory for facts, events, times, dates, names (giving the impression of unreliability).
- Lack of verbal fluency, misunderstandings or misinterpretations (giving the impression of evasiveness).
- Difficulty presenting a sequence of events in a logical, structured way.
- Missing the implications of what is said, or interpreting it over-literally.
- Even if reading skills are adequate, 'digesting' written material and skimming through documentation to locate information is very challenging.
- Poor handwriting/writing skills so form-filling and responding to communications is very laborious and often avoided.
- A heightened sensitivity to noise and visual stimuli together with impaired ability to screen them out.
- Fundamental problems with organisation, time-management and prioritisation.
- Weak listening skills, a limited attention span, inability to remain focused.
- Mental overload leading to dis-engagement or 'switching off'.

Another issue is stress: although strategies for coping with everyday life are usually well developed by adulthood, these 'work-arounds' break down in times of stress, increasing vulnerability. In fact, heightened susceptibility to the effects of stress is a well-documented feature of Dyslexia etc. rendering those affected dysfunctional at times. Put this in the context of negotiating the CJS and it adds up to a considerable disadvantage, which if not understood and accommodated, might lead to misunderstandings, self-incrimination and breaching of orders or conditions.

Examples include forgetting probation appointments, confusing the date of a court appearance or making errors with settling fines. This was the focus of my first encounter with Probation, a project with Greater Manchester Probation Service (GMPS) in the late 1990s. It arose out of the low rates of compliance with Probation Orders amongst some clients. GMPS suspected that Dyslexia might be a factor. So we mapped the various aspects of Orders and procedures against the characteristics of Dyslexia, and found that there were many elements where the client could be 'at risk'. Strategies were devised for the four areas of Reading / Speaking & Listening / Writing / Personal Organisation; follow-up training was provided for Probation and ETE staff. The good practice arising out of this project can be found at [www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/GMPS information sheets.doc](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/GMPS_information_sheets.doc)

Later work for Sussex Surrey Probation Trust led to the development of a resource bank for the sector, along with a much-disseminated booklet, known as 'KIWLs':

**K** = Key factors (of each 'specific' condition)

**I** = Impact

**W** = Ways of working (with people affected)

**I** = Further Information

'KIWLs' were featured in an edition of the Offender Engagement Programme News.

[www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Resources for justice sector staff - Kiwis.pdf](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Resources_for_justice_sector_staff_-_Kiwis.pdf)

Another opportunity to convey the impact of Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, ADHD, Dyscalculia and Asperger Syndrome was an invitation to train Forensic Psychologists employed by Trusts. My most recent involvement (2012-14) was as Dyslexia Consultant on the Reference Group for SEEDS (Skills for Effective Engagement, Development & Supervision (later evolving into iSEEDS).

The resources linked to this article are a good starting point to inform 'reasonable adjustments'. One further area to which I always draw attention is Visual Stress, whereby readers repeatedly lose the place, perceive text as moving or blurring, and/or find that white paper gives off an unpleasant glare. Visual Stress is common amongst people with Dyslexia and Dyspraxia and can usually be treated by specialist opticians. Details / checklists at [www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/visualstress](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/visualstress)

Certain features of written text, summarised below, are crucial in the way they can affect the accessibility of any forms, letters or notices that you might issue.

## DO's and DON'Ts in written communications

### DO USE

- adequately sized fonts, at least size 12
- good spacing
- justify left (leave a ragged right margin)
- selective use of bold and bullet points
- sans serif fonts e.g Arial, Verdana, Tahoma
- pictograms, graphics, diagrams, charts

**Aim for a clear uncluttered page**

### DON'T USE

- small fonts (below size 12)
- cramped text
- (right) justified or centred text
- WHOLE WORDS AND PHRASES IN CAPITALS
- 'fancy' or unusual fonts or italics
- printing in either red or green

**Avoid busy, overcrowded pages**

So, what am I advocating? Now the new model for a Probation Service is up and running, you have the chance to build in awareness of those hidden vulnerabilities which could affect up to one fifth of your clients, and to disseminate good practice.

I would draw your attention to two resources recently developed by HMPPS for use in prisons: the Initial and Detailed LDD Screeners.<sup>3</sup> Given that Probation is dealing with the same population, it would make sense to consult these tools.

Furthermore, an important initiative is now underway which should prove helpful. At the end of 2019, the Ministry of Justice commissioned a Call for Evidence on Neurodiversity to be conducted by the joint Inspectorates of Prison, Probation and the Constabulary. The four areas

of focus are Screening/identification, Reasonable Adjustments, Interventions and Staff Training. Outcomes should inform the sectors of Prison, Probation, Courts and Police.

To conclude, I hope that, one way or another, Probation staff will familiarise themselves with the signs of Neurodiversity, so that they are ready and able to offer appropriate support, determine reasonable adjustments, improve readability/accessibility and signpost those affected to specialist services as necessary. Readers are welcome to contact me for further information.

**Website:** [www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk)

**Email:** [mj@dyslexia-malvern.co.uk](mailto:mj@dyslexia-malvern.co.uk)

<sup>3</sup> LDD' stands for Learning Difficulties and / or Disabilities - confusing terminology which has been in use in prisons from early 2000.  
<http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/resources>

## **What if you can't actually read the time, date and location of your appointment with Probation?**

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Illiteracy affects around 50% of people in prison and in this article Ian Merrill explores some of the implications for probation practice and outlines how Shannon Trust is seeking to tackle the problem.

It seems that the criminal justice system is back under the microscope as central government places a renewed focus on reducing re-offending, and the latest re-organisation of probation services is driven through. For those working in and around probation services - and for people who have offended and are in contact with such services - this must generate mixed feelings; on the one hand it is more change, another set of initiatives, more re-structuring and further upheaval - and on the other, it is the opportunity to test out new ideas, to explore new partnerships and ways of working, and ultimately a chance for lives, and communities, to change for the better.

When it comes to working with and supporting those who have committed crimes, there is broad agreement on what makes a real difference in attempts to reduce the likelihood of further offending taking place. If people have decent accommodation, can access effective physical and mental health services, as well as impactful drug and alcohol treatment, engage in quality education, relevant training and even get paid employment then, with a following wind, life can look much better. All of this underpinned by good, supportive relationships of course.

If you are reading this article and thinking that there are elements missing from that list of relevant factors, then you are correct - the list isn't comprehensive and we could add to it for sure. However, how many revised lists would include 'ability to read'? Typically, research studies into criminogenic risk factors do not tend to flag the importance of literacy amongst the complex array of factors involved in offending and rehabilitation. Education and employment do



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Shannon Trust

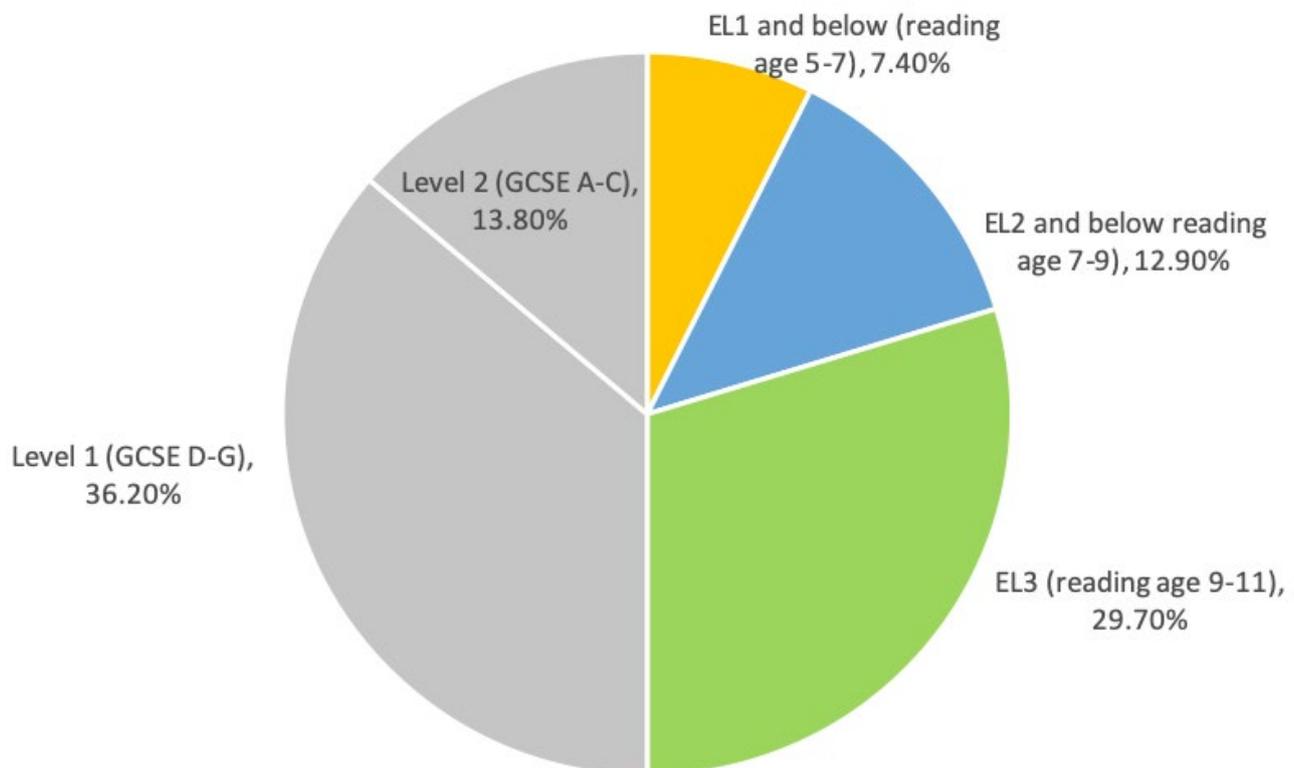
appear in such lists of what is important; however, the opportunity to learn new skills, acquire knowledge and secure a job are significantly improved when the ability to read is part of one's tool kit. So, how many people does illiteracy affect?

### Illiteracy affects around 50% of people in prison

Data from the prison estate is fairly easy to come by, and is an indication of the size of the issue. By any standards, the scale of illiteracy amongst people in prison is eye-watering; at least 50%<sup>1</sup> have some degree of difficulty with reading and are assessed as below 'Level 1' which equates to GCSE grade D-G.

<sup>1</sup> [An-assessment-of-the-English-and-maths-skills-levels-of-prisoners-in-England2.pdf](#) (nrdc.org.uk)

## Prisoner literacy levels



An accurate picture of the number of people with literacy issues in contact with Probation and related services is harder to come by, but it is reasonable to assume that illiteracy levels amongst Probation clients will tell a similar story to that of the prison population. To put that in straightforward terms, a Probation Officer's caseload could include 50% of people who either cannot, or struggle to read. And the inability to read causes lots of problems, for all those involved.

### The inability to read creates everyday difficulties and can hinder life chances

At Shannon Trust, we hear stories every day about the challenges of illiteracy from people

living and working in prisons across England, Wales and Northern Ireland; problems that affect people when in prison - and when they are released. Hearing these stories highlights the lengths people often go to, to hide their inability to read and the human ingenuity in finding ways around the issue. After all, illiteracy continues to carry much stigma. Some examples from day-to-day prison life, trying to build family ties and taking up education and training can demonstrate this.

In terms of day-to-day prison life, an inability to read throws up a number of challenges. For some non-readers choosing food from the menu is difficult; non-readers often memorise the appearance of one menu item, and as a consequence end up eating the same food for much of the time.



Furthermore, prison life tends to revolve around snippets of written information on pieces of paper or wall posters, and this includes requests to do almost all prison-based activity of any kind. Non-readers will find many 'workarounds' to navigate daily life and get things done, but will still miss out in many ways.

For many people in prison, maintaining or re-establishing links to family is an important part of wellbeing and can be a significant factor in successful reintegration once released. Building those family relationships whilst still in prison clearly has its limitations, so reading and writing letters remains an important part of this. However, those unable to read or write may have to rely on a cell-mate or another prisoner to help, and this is not always possible or perhaps even safe. For this reason, one of the personal goals of a reading learner is often to be able to read a letter from home, and then write a reply.

Few would disagree that access to education and training for people in prison is an important factor in the productive use of time, successful

reintegration upon release and the prospects of reduced re-offending. However, for the 50% of the prison population that struggle with reading and often have negative experiences of education as a young person, taking up classroom-based courses can seem well out of reach - the inability to read and the resulting lack of self-confidence are powerful barriers to learning.

### Addressing illiteracy in prisons

Shannon Trust's work across prisons aims to address the issue of illiteracy. Our work has been trauma informed for some time: the model takes into consideration the damaging impact of school exclusions and undiagnosed Learning Disability & Difficulty by providing informal, peer to peer learning in short bursts. We don't try to push people in prison back into the classroom - quite possibly where the trauma occurred. We recognise that many of our potential learners have had Adverse Childhood Experiences, often part of the reason why they never learnt to read in the first place.

The phonics-based reading programme that Shannon Trust has developed - Turning Pages - is a tried and tested tool<sup>2</sup> used to train Peer Mentors - people in prison who can read - to help those who cannot read to learn to do so. More recently, COVID19 has changed much about prison life, and we have adapted to the reality of social restrictions by adding the ability to train Mentors remotely and we continue to develop more self-study options to promote greater learner choice and to meet the challenge of prison regime changes.

By learning to read with Shannon Trust - and through building self-confidence that comes with acquiring that new skill - many of the people in prison we work with develop or rediscover an appetite for more education. This is evident through the positive stories we hear and the further take-up of classroom-based training and education opportunities that are crucial to improved life chances and the reduction of re-offending<sup>3</sup>. However, for many people in prison, learning journeys don't start or are often interrupted because they are released into the community. So, what can be done about continuity of learning post-release?

## Turning Pages in the community

In recognition that the vast majority of people in prison will be released in the short-to-medium term, Shannon Trust are now piloting use of Turning Pages in community settings; a number of Probation services and drug & alcohol treatment providers such as WDP are [taking part](#).

The pilots are testing how our approach can be adapted so that as well as peer-to-peer mentors, others can act as a 'reading coach', whether that be community agency staff or volunteers. Our aim here is to make Turning Pages available to many more people who would benefit.

Ultimately, getting true scale in the number of those learning to read this way - and meeting the high level of need - will require the development of digital access to Turning Pages, and to that end Shannon Trust and its digital development partner Yalla - supported by initial funding from the Ministry of Justice Prison Leaver Innovation Fund - are now working on the digitisation of our learning resources. Our intention - during 2022 - is to bring Turning Pages to Probation and community services across the UK - as an important tool in work to reduce re-offending.

If you are a Probation Officer or a member of staff in a community agency, it might be time to re-look at your caseload and assess whether illiteracy is an issue for anyone you are supporting. Would learning to read help those people to address their offending behaviour? If you are a service manager, does your team actively consider illiteracy as an important factor? As we have seen, learning to read can be a critical first step towards a very different future for the people caught up in the criminal justice system, once we recognise the foundational importance of being able to read.

For more information about how Shannon Trust can help, go to [www.shannontrust.org.uk](http://www.shannontrust.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Turning Pages, Changing Lives: An Evaluation of the Shannon Trust Reading Programme Turning Pages, Birmingham City University, Faculty of Health, Education & Life Sciences 2017

<sup>3</sup> Shannon Trust annual survey data indicates around 85% of learners go onto other prison education courses

# Recognising bereavement experiences within probation delivery

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Natalie Rutter provides an overview of her recent research and article on the way in which people under probation supervision experience bereavement and how this can impact on desistance.

Bereavement, loss and grief are experienced by us all, with differing responses and effects yet there has been little consideration of how individuals under probation supervision experience these issues. In this article I explore bereavement through analysis of personal stories where individual experiences of bereavement were identified as a prominent theme in my doctoral research focusing on desistance from crime and the role of relational networks (Rutter, 2021). In my research I spoke to 12 men and 13 women and adopted a longitudinal approach. This enabled the recognition of an individual's changing narratives and offered a point of reference in an ongoing story. Listening to individuals highlighted the role of emotion, trauma, attachment and the ripple effect of bereavement alongside the importance of developing and building resilience as important in the context of both bereavement and desistance.

Death occurs within a personal and social context with experiences of bereavement mirroring desistance from crime, regarded as a far from linear and straightforward process (Rutter, 2021). Life events, such as bereavement, influence desistance with relational networks playing an important role in both. Yet previous research and current practice focuses only on relationships with those still living.

### A process similar to desistance

A person's experience of bereavement is unique and cannot be predicted (Doka, 2016), just like an individual's journey of desistance. Matthew highlights how his experiences of bereavement represent similarities to the zigzag nature of desistance.



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*"it's never bothered me since he died ... it's been nearly 12 years ... a few weeks back I was sat thinking about him and I got quite upset really." (Matthew)*

Here Matthew demonstrates the prolonged impact of bereavement, complicating the grieving process (Shear and Shair, 2005). During our conversations Matthew also highlighted how his emerging feelings of loss left him reconsidering his drug use as a coping mechanism which could complicate his journey of desistance through the feelings and emotions that resurfaced.

## The role of emotion

Emotionally, bereavement can be confusing and disorientating, influencing our coping mechanisms (Read and Santatzoglou, 2018) and therefore opportunities for change. Emotions are both personal and social through our interactions with others, and require consideration within experiences of both bereavement and desistance. For Jim losing his mother negatively impacted his emotional and mental health.

*"The depression got worse after me mum passed away ... she didn't die of natural causes in that respect, she was married to a heroin addict." (Jim)*

Jim's story also highlights the prevalence of traumatic bereavement, an experience shared by many that can pose challenges to desistance.

## Identifying trauma

Alongside the circumstances surrounding death, how an individual experiences bereavement can also be traumatic. For example, suicide, murder and drug related deaths are regarded as traumatic bereavement and are often stigmatised, resulting in limited support (Perreault et al., 2010) and emotional trauma as experienced by Karen:

*"When me Grandma was murdered ... I went real bad, I went psycho. Like I was looking round for this guy ... her ex-bloke that beat her and killed her ... and I wish I never broke in ... coz there was just f\*\*king blood everywhere ... and I started getting real bad dreams." (Karen)*

Unfortunately, individuals within the criminal justice system are more likely than the general

population to experience traumatic bereavement (Vaswani, 2014) and loss at a disproportionate rate (De, 2018). When ignored, trauma can increase the likelihood of criminality with individuals struggling to access appropriate support (Halsey 2017), which, in turn, can hinder the process of desistance.

## The loss of attachment

Sarah's story provides insight to the loss of a relationship where strong attachment is evidenced, and how - when left unresolved - can have a cumulative and continued emotional and traumatic effect:

*"me girls were like you filled your life with him [father-in-law], just sitting and talking to him and then suddenly you had nothing." (Sarah)*

Attachment is critical to personal development, with attachment security attained through consistent accessible and responsive experiences (Bowlby, 1982). The loss of attachment, through experiences of bereavement, can prompt sudden changes in lifestyle (Byrne and Trew, 2008) which demonstrates unpredictability and highlights the importance of the ripple effect when considering the impact of bereavement.

## Recognising the ripple effect

The far-reaching ripple effect of bereavement on a person's life is clear (Vaswani, 2014):

*"Sometimes I wish me mum was still here because she kept us all strong and once she passed away everything just went downhill ... family feuds started." (Jim)*

Above, Matthew showed how his bereavement led to the ripples of drug addiction whilst Sarah's story highlights how her experience resulted in her involvement in gambling, ultimately leading to her engagement in criminal behaviour:

*"When you look back for triggers ... when we lost me husband's dad, he died in the December and in the February, I started gambling ... my life just turned upside down nothing was normal." (Sarah)*

Recognising the ripples of bereavement means taking both individual responses and wider social circumstances into account. Thus, acknowledging emotion, trauma and attachment, especially when supporting people to desist from offending becomes ever more important.

## Building resilience

Building resilience is central when considering both desistance and bereavement. This was discussed by Sarah, alongside her personal responses to bereavement, gradual recovery and significant readjustment:

*"I think you just have to work through it all and there is no time scale ... people deal with it differently ... I think this has been harder to get control over ... with this my life just turned upside down nothing was normal ... it did take me so long just to get me head round everything ... how it changed my life, how it changed everybody else's lives ... and I would say it's took me a good 20 months easily ... to sort of get to the stage where I am now ... and maybe in like 6 months' time somebody else says something and you suddenly go whoa but I think I am in a lot better place to deal with that now." (Sarah)*

Sarah's story demonstrates how her resilience developed over time as she grieved her father-in-law and the emotion, trauma, loss of attachment and ripple effect she experienced. Importantly, all of this influenced her experiences of bereavement and desistance from crime.

## Practice Implications

Recognising the unique and complex experiences of bereavement and grief, alongside the wide ranging an individual nature of impact is important for probation practice. This, in conjunction with understanding the interconnected nature of bereavement and desistance, has the potential to enable probation staff to build stronger relationships with individuals, develop understanding and offer greater support.

Concerns have been raised regarding the difficulties professionals face when attempting to engage in conversations about bereavement due to sensitivity, limited knowledge or training and insufficient awareness of resources (Read et al., 2019). In addition, a focus on risk, and its management, can result in neglecting experiences of bereavement as a welfare concern beyond the remit of those involved in rehabilitative practices (Hester and Taylor, 2011).

To negotiate and overcome this within the context of community supervision it is important to consider the expansion, commissioning, or development of bereavement services for people under probation supervision and those working within probation (De, 2018). Engaging in conversations surrounding bereavement experiences also enables the opportunity for practice assessments (for example OASys) to be used to recognise experiences as potential dynamic risk factors. In turn, this recognises the individual and their circumstances so that the role and impact of emotion, trauma, loss of attachment and the ripple effect of bereavement are fully acknowledged.

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# The Future of Probation



## Unifying the Probation Service

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Jim Barton provides a personal reflection on the process of unification and offers some thoughts on what's next.

## Countdown to unification

Early on in my role as SRO for Probation Reform, I bought a digital timer to count down the months, days, hours and minutes until midnight on 25 June 2021 - The day we would become one unified probation system. The not-so-subtle reminder that we had a huge task ahead of us before it displayed a row of zeros became somewhat of a conversation piece in those early virtual team meetings.

Fast forward a few months and our programme team was running at pace. We'd attracted skilled people across a range of disciplines, from within and outside of probation, and everyone now had an acute appreciation of the scale of the challenge and our delivery deadline. People who admitted struggling to recall their family members' birthdays had 25 June 2021 etched on the brain. The timer had become redundant and I was secretly pleased to confine it to my desk drawer when the batteries ran out long before Day 1 of our new Probation Service.

## Day 1 of the Probation Service

Our team put heart and soul into bringing together the very best of the NPS (National Probation Service) and CRCs (Community Rehabilitation Companies) into our now newly named 'Probation Service' - a name we felt was not too far from our roots but responded to feedback from our people that a new name was a strong signal of us being a new organisation. We had prepared to welcome more than 7,000 probation professionals either directly into



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our services or into our partner organisations appointed to deliver commissioned rehabilitative services. We had created an incredibly popular website specifically to be a one stop shop of information to support their transition. We had supplied new laptops and smartphones to home addresses, migrated terabytes of data and emails, connected 120 new offices and had a dedicated support structure in place, including a control room with 24-hour coverage, ready for the big day.

Everyone involved should feel incredibly proud of having pulled off the task of transitioning to our new structures on time and to plan. Inevitably there are challenges, and a huge amount of work still to be done, but we have achieved the first big step towards our future operating model.

## Taking time to unify

We're mindful that our transformation has put many of our people through a lot of change in a relatively short time period. We all adapt to change in different ways and at varied pace, so our focus now is to ensure that everyone completes a smooth transition and is content in their new work environment.

To support this, we are making minimal changes to our operational processes during this early post-unification period. Instead, we are focussed on ensuring the changes we designed to bring stability to the organisation are effectively embedded.

## Reforms built on solid foundations

Our next step is to begin implementing the reforms set out in our Target Operating Model, published in February, that will improve how we protect the public and positively change lives.

Regional delivery is core to our plans for truly transforming our Probation Service. Drawing on our people's extensive local knowledge and empowering them to take accountability for partnership working and delivery of services will enable us to more closely meet the diverse needs of communities and people on probation.

In sentence management we are focusing on more consistent management and delivery of sentence plans, better assessment and management of risk and more balanced caseloads with an improved case allocation process to support this.

For Unpaid Work, Accredited Programmes and Structured Interventions we will be driving up completion rates and delivering better outcomes. We'll do this by making programmes available

locally, making improvements to the assessment and induction process and more regular reviews of active cases.

We also have ambitions to put Unpaid Work hours to even better use, establishing more partnerships with national organisations to help improve the visibility of the punishment in local communities.

Our commissioned rehabilitative service providers are crucial in delivering services in Employment, Training & Education, Accommodation and Personal Wellbeing and Women's Services. Backed by an initial government investment of £195 million, 26 organisations across England and Wales are now working closely with us to provide vital support in these interventions.

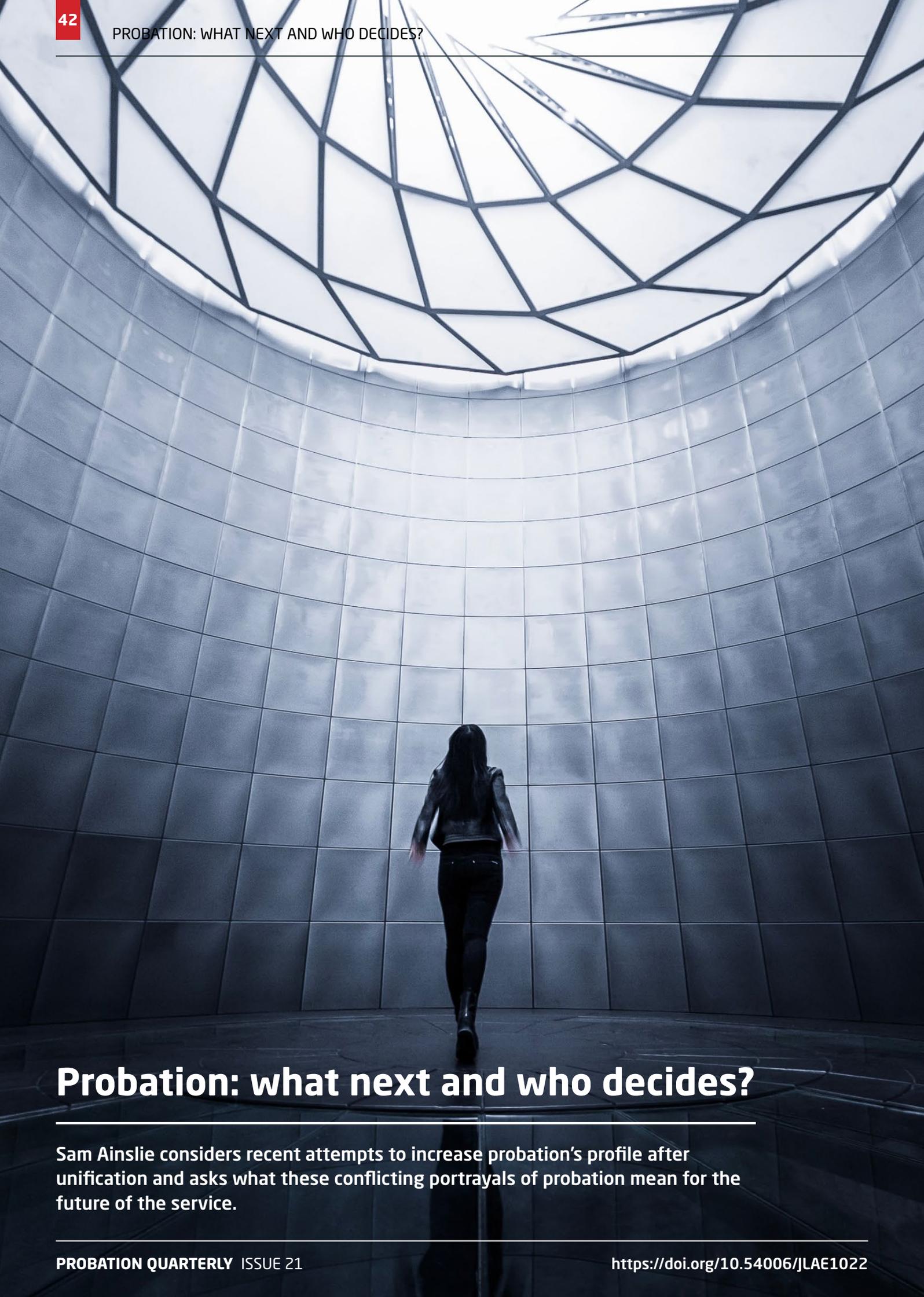
## Investing in our people

Our staff are critical to the delivery of the new model and we have a comprehensive plan in place to support them to succeed in the new service. Our Probation Workforce Strategy, published last year, includes a professional register, underpinned by ethical and training standards, to ensure probation practitioners receive the training, qualifications and recognition they need and rightly deserve.

Of course, those joining our team can also expect this same high level of support. This applies to more than 1,000 probation officers we recently announced had been recruited and to an intake of a further 1500 planned for the year ahead.

## Find out more

There has never been a more unique and exciting time for the Probation Service. If you are interested in finding out more about our reforms, do sign up to our Probation Changes Bulletin.

A person with long dark hair, wearing a dark jacket and pants, is walking away from the camera towards the center of a large, circular, vaulted space. The ceiling is a complex, geometric grid of dark lines, and the walls are composed of large, light-colored rectangular panels. The lighting is dramatic, with the person silhouetted against the bright, vaulted ceiling.

## Probation: what next and who decides?

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Sam Ainslie considers recent attempts to increase probation's profile after unification and asks what these conflicting portrayals of probation mean for the future of the service.

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I have previously argued that there is a need to address the dissonance and instrumentalism within probation policy and practice documentation, to provide a clear mandate for desistance-supportive practice and greater alignment with the values of practitioners (Ainslie, 2021). The unification of probation services in England and Wales at the end of June 2021 has inevitably heralded a raft of new documentation and communication from key policy personnel seeking to engage with the 16,000 probation staff across England and Wales and the general public; crucially, this includes the 220,000 individuals subject to probation intervention. With this in mind, I've returned to the work of Weiss and Wozner (2002) to explore which 'model' of probation has been communicated during the unification process and to consider 'what next for probation?' and 'who decides?'

Based on a review of probation literature, Weiss and Wozner (2002) outlined 10 alternative models for probation services based on key variables including underlying perceptions of the causes of crime and the goal of punishment; the aims of probation; the key audience for intervention; the strategies used and the role of probation practitioners. The models sit within two main categories where probation is either perceived as an alternative to punishment (with little emphasis placed on control, surveillance or enforcement) or as an alternative *form* of punishment (where emphasis is placed on responsibility for offending behaviour and minimal attention is paid to support and care



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functions). Whilst acknowledging the considerable debates that exist about probation practice, Weiss and Wozner argued that the 10 models can be used to define probation and assist with 'locating and identifying changes in approach' (2002: 85). What follows is a reflection on the 'models' that are suggested in recent probation communication and documentation.

In a video deployed through Twitter in the week of unification, the MOJ present probation practitioners as 'crime fighters' who use technology (polygraph tests and sobriety tags to name just two) to monitor 'dangerous offenders' and 'protect the public' from serious harm.

This vision of probation characterised by enforcement and surveillance, and where the public are identified as the 'client of protection' resembles Weiss and Wozner's 'supervision' model (2002: 101) where the aim of probation becomes imprisonment and incapacitation is the prevailing philosophy of punishment. At best, it suggests an approach aligned to the 'retribution' model where the aim of probation is punishment in the community with a singular focus on public protection in the absence of supporting service-user change.

This positioning of probation is arguably at odds with the messaging from HMPPS in recent months. The Target Operating Model for Probation (HMPPS, 2021) declares that the purpose of probation is to 'Assess, Protect and Change' and aims to protect 'against further offences' whilst 'addressing the harm caused by the original offence' (2019: 6). So here we see again the 'retribution model' with the positioning of the public as the client in need of protection and an effort to present probation as a 'robust and effective' alternative to custodial sentences which can be delivered through resource brokerage. Here we also see evidence of Weiss and Wozner's 'case management' model where the primary role of practitioners is to assess need and broker interventions. In a positive development there is a commitment to using non-stigmatising language, although there is clear dissonance between this and the MOJ communication used to promote the unified service to the public.

Further dissonance is evident with the Target Operating Model's commitment to using unification to 'reinforce' probation ethics (2021: 6). Whilst these are not outlined in the document,

a footnote provides the link to the Probation Institute Code of Ethics. Listed in primary position is the belief in the capacity of service-users to achieve a change for the better; a belief consistently communicated by practitioners in the course of probation research despite organisational turmoil and change (Ainslie, 2021; Deering, 2011). This belief is closely followed by charging probation with responsibility for the promotion of social justice and social inclusion, and therefore an alignment with Weiss and Wozner's 'reintegration model'. Here probation practitioners are tasked with working with service-users and the community (both positioned as clients for change) to achieve 'mutual tolerance and positive relationships' (2002:91) with the aim of community integration and the delivery of rehabilitation. So, whilst the Probation Institute position does not align completely with Weiss and Wozner's 'radical socialist model', the commitment to social reform, community change and empowerment of service users suggests some overlap.

Finally, the Chief Inspector of Probation provides yet another vision for probation as deliverer of 'effective programmes' that seek to 'prevent re-offending' and 'properly support and inform victims' (Russell, 2021). The focus here on probation work as a vehicle for crime reduction and public protection, but with a foregrounding of commitment to victims is suggestive of Weiss and Wozner's 'justice model' intertwined with the assessment and brokerage aspects of the 'case management' model that has prevailed in England and Wales in the last 20 years. Here it would seem that the vision of probation continues to be influenced by an efficiency credo that is characterised by pragmatism and efficiency (Rutherford, 1994).

## Implications

Somewhat ironically then, at a time of unification there would appear to be continued dissonance in terms of the stated aims of probation and the underlying values and principles that guide probation work. This dissonance is nothing new to probation practitioners or those who research probation work. It is however disappointing given the potential impact on staff morale and occupational identity already weakened by Transforming Rehabilitation. Arguably this dissonance does little to aid public perception of probation and instead (if we consider the MOJ portrayal) has the potential to strengthen the structural barriers experienced by people on probation in the form of further discrimination and 'othering'.

Finally, as an academic with responsibility for teaching PQiP students, I find myself considering the impact of this dissonance on recruitment and training under the unified model of probation. When applying to become a Probation Officer, which 'model' of probation do trainees believe they will be delivering and how equipped are they to navigate the potential conflict between their values and the stated organisational aims? As Weiss and Wozner rightly conclude, 'most aspects of probation are the subject of considerable debate' (2002:86), and it looks like this debate is set to continue despite the opportunity provided by unification to provide a more coherent vision of probation for the future.

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## What does unification of the Probation Service mean for race equality?

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Shadae Cazeau examines the unification of probation through the lens of race equality to think about what it means for black, Asian and minority ethnic and Muslim communities in the criminal justice system.

## Introduction - who are EQUAL?

EQUAL are a National Independent Advisory Group (NIAG) who work collaboratively to improve outcomes for black, Asian and minority ethnic and Muslim communities in the criminal justice system.

EQUAL works collaboratively across the voluntary sector to deliver fair outcomes for all. The NIAG works to support those involved in the development and delivery of criminal justice practice and policy to create a system free from disproportionate outcomes for black and minority ethnic communities.

We believe that action must be taken to address the issues that lead to unjust experiences and outcomes for black and minority ethnic people in the criminal justice system, with one of our key areas of focus being prisons and probation. Having recently reunified it is not yet clear how successful the Probation Service will be in properly engaging and commissioning the voluntary sector, though it is encouraging to see the new commissioning mechanisms and equalities considerations in the Target Operating Model (TOM).

As EQUAL's focus is primarily on race equality, we will consider the implications for ethnic minority staff and service users as well as any opportunities, issues and what we would like to see the NPS committing to moving forward.



**Shadae Cazeau**  
Head of Policy, EQUAL NIAG

## Workforce representation

Currently, the probation workforce is made up of 10.4% of people self-declaring as black, Asian or minority ethnic<sup>1</sup>, almost 7% higher than lower than the proportion of black, Asian and minority ethnic communities across the UK but still disappointing given the disproportionate number of ethnic minorities in the criminal justice system.<sup>2</sup> However, a recent HM inspectorate of Probation report found that despite staff being recorded nothing has been done with the data to identify and address the disproportionality.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice. (2020). HM Prison and Probation Service annual staff equalities report 2019 to 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-and-probation-service-annual-staff-equalities-report-2019-to-2020>. Accessed 18/08/2021.

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics. (2018, updated 2020). Population of England and Wales, from the 2011 Census. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest>. Accessed 18/08/2021.

It is encouraging to see the Probation Workforce Strategy Models has placed a renewed focus on equalities and “*creating a more diverse workplace, where everyone feels included*” however it is important from our perspective, that ethnicity data is used as a tool to address issues in workforce diversity and not simply as a tick box exercise.<sup>3</sup>

## Dynamic framework

The new dynamic framework and its ability to allow rehabilitative and resettlement services to be commissioned separately to address differing service user needs has possibly been the most significant change as a result of the reunification of the NPS.

This has the potential to be particularly beneficial for minority ethnic service users who need and would benefit from specialist services to address the cultural challenges they experience in rehabilitation and resettlement. However, a report from special interest group RR3 found that despite assurances from Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) that qualification for the framework would be simple the process needs to be further simplified and accompanied by guidance.<sup>4</sup>

For the dynamic framework to work effectively it needs to be made accessible so the specialist organisations it seeks to target can be properly

considered for commission. This includes ensuring that even once an organisation qualifies onto the framework, they are supported to submit successful bids. We know all too often that smaller, grassroots, and frontline organisations struggle to resource this kind of work in addition to their ongoing service delivery.

## Target Operating Model

The new TOM sets out HMPPS aspirations for the future of probation and commits to focusing on equalities throughout the delivery of the work. This includes equality analysis being undertaken at the beginning and throughout the design of procedures and practices. Crucial to this, is being able to provide evidence of tangible change and where that isn’t possible reforming policies and practices under the ‘*explain or reform*’ Lammy principle.<sup>5</sup>

The TOM was published in February 2021, before the more recent Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill began making its way through Parliament. It has therefore been drafted without consideration of the changes introduced by the Bill. The Bill now gives the responsibility for setting licence conditions for fixed term prisoners to probation officers and a new power for a responsible officer to vary a curfew requirement made under a community order or suspended sentence.

<sup>3</sup> HM Prison and Probation Service Probation Workforce Strategy 2020 - 2023 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/905417/probation-workforce-strategy-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/905417/probation-workforce-strategy-report.pdf). Accessed 18/08/2021.

<sup>4</sup> RR3 special interest group on probation reform, June 2021 [https://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/RR3%20special%20interest%20group%20on%20probation%20reform%20-%20final%20report\\_0.pdf](https://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/RR3%20special%20interest%20group%20on%20probation%20reform%20-%20final%20report_0.pdf). Accessed 18/08/2021.

<sup>5</sup> Lammy Review, September 2017 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/643001/lammy-review-final-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/643001/lammy-review-final-report.pdf). Accessed 18/08/2021.

HMPPS will need to consider how they will achieve their equalities objectives when the new and enhanced powers granted by the bill have already been identified as likely to indirectly discriminate against black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. This is even more pertinent considering the recent HM Inspectorate of Probation report: Race equality in probation, which found that three quarters of minority ethnic service users failed to receive referrals or assistance in an area known to affect re-offending (accommodation, mental health etc), that white staff had struggled to understand the backgrounds of service users from minority ethnic groups and those service users' *"experiences of racism in probation were spontaneously compared with previous experiences"*.<sup>6</sup>

Effectively, this means for the TOM to be effective probation staff must become culturally competent, and quickly. Failure to do so will likely undermine the intentions of the TOM and result in further racial disparities as probation powers increase.

Similarly, the same HMIP report found the quality of pre-sentence reports on black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals was insufficient in 21 of the 51 reports inspected and that although

initiatives to improve PSR's had been piloted no formal evaluation had been completed. This is a clear cause for concern, especially when the PCSC bill proposes to increase sentences despite identifying in the government's own equality impact assessments that the proposal is likely to indirectly discriminate against minority ethnic groups; making it imperative that PSR's properly reflect the individuals experience and circumstances.

## Conclusion

The aspirations set out by the TOM and the opportunities created by the dynamic framework are admirable, but it is tangible results that are important. The probation workforce should reflect the UK demographic, with probation staff encouraging conversations about race and culture with minority ethnic service users.

Moreover, and most importantly, ethnicity data on outcomes for service users needs to be recorded and published. We know how black, Asian and minority ethnic groups feel about the probation service but without the quantitative data we are unable to really understand or appreciate the true extent of the disproportionality.

<sup>6</sup> HM Inspectorate of Probation, Race equality in probation: the experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic probation service users and staff, March 2021 <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/03/Race-Equality-in-Probation-thematic-inspection-report-v1.0.pdf>. Accessed 18/08/2021.

# Post-unification priorities for probation: former practitioners' perspectives

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Two former practitioners who recently moved to academia reflect on their experiences of working in probation and identify some priorities for the service post-unification.

As two recent former practitioners who are now working as lecturers on the Community Justice programme, we would like to use this article to reflect on our own experiences of Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) and unification. The impact of TR was deep, traumatic and hit hard, dividing staff both physically and professionally. This emotional impact led to experienced practitioners leaving the profession earlier than planned and has left the organisation lacking in experienced staff. Unification is a step in the right direction but will be a long process. For staff to be confident that any positive changes will remain in place for decades rather than a few years this transformation needs a long-term commitment from policy makers and leaders.

The Probation Workforce Strategy under the Target Operating Model (TOM) (HMPPS, 2021) sets out a positive picture in terms of providing staff with manageable workloads to allow the time for learning and development. There is also recognition that practitioners have endured substantial change in recent years because of TR. Implementation of the TOM commenced on 26 June 2021 but will take a long time to embed. It is worth noting that the 'TOM- roadmap' goes to April 2024 and beyond. The 'lift and shift' approach (HMIP, 2021) will mean that staff having a blended caseload will be deferred. It may well be the case that staff may struggle to cope with managing their existing caseloads and simultaneously complete any training required. Challenges in developing and refreshing the skills needed to work with a blended caseload will further be affected by practitioners continuing to work from home (due to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic), as this will reduce the opportunities to collaborate and reflect with others in their team.

Staff will be feeling vulnerable and anxious, and do not necessarily share the enthusiasm regarding unification that is evident in the higher ranks of the Probation Service. This needs to



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be considered in the early stages of unification. 'Welcome events' need to be laying the foundations for an environment that encourages communication and acknowledge the mixed emotions that staff are experiencing. Centring on the importance of targets, updating risk registers and case records risks alienating some staff. How staff feel will always impact on their performance and this needs to be recognised and accounted for.

Emotional literacy defines the skills that practitioners may use in understanding their own emotions and working effectively and appropriately with the emotions of offenders, victims and witnesses (Knight, 2014). Phillips et al (2020) highlight the importance of using, managing and displaying emotions when working with people on probation as critical to effective probation practice. The volume of information received by practitioners, often cascaded via email communication daily, risks impacting on morale and people's ability to remain emotionally literate in their work with people on probation. It is therefore important that Senior Managers are also emotionally literate having the ability to empathise and have insight into how practitioners are feeling. It is all too easy to compile and click 'send' on yet another email - achieving that sense of 'ticking the box' - without recognising how the email is received or whether the practitioner has read it (in their ever-overloaded inbox).

A further challenge for the organisation will be to align the differing skills between NPS and CRC practitioners and for both sets of practitioners to familiarise themselves with certain types of cases that they will not have worked with for some years. Having qualified in 2002, Deena Parmar was a Probation Officer in the CRC for four years. She then joined the NPS in 2018 and reflects that at the time she felt as though she had joined a completely different organisation. It took her approximately 12 months before feeling competent in completing an OASys that met the NPS Quality Assurance Standards and the same amount of time again to feel confident in working with people who posed a High Risk of Serious Harm, MAPPA cases and sex offender cases. It is by drawing upon these personal experiences that we anticipate challenges for CRC practitioners as unification embeds in its early stages. At the same time, former NPS Probation Practitioners will also need to (re)learn how to manage specific medium risk of harm cases without MAPPA oversight. As an example, CRC

Probation Practitioners have become accustomed to managing (often) chaotic and complex medium risk of harm domestic violence perpetrators, without the safety net of formal multi-agency arrangements in place to support them in managing risk.

In 2020 the NPS introduced the four pillars approach to risk management which incorporates the elements of supervision, monitoring and control, interventions and treatment and victim safety planning as developed by Kemshall (HMIP, 2020). Practitioners who have worked in the CRCs, will have either had a seven-year gap in working with sex offenders and holding MAPPA cases or have never had any experience of working with such caseloads. Therefore, (re) developing the skills needed for an OASys which will meet the standards expected within the Probation Service could well be a significant challenge for some practitioners. This will require time to embed and will need enabling and supportive line management to allay any undue pressure and anxiety.

There has recently been an injection of funding for the Probation Service, helping to more than double the recruitment of Probation Officers (GOV UK, 2021). In doing so, the organisation may start to be able to operate in a manner that allows for that collaborative and meaningful relationship between the practitioner and the person on probation, which is vital in terms of desistance. The impact of such an intensive recruitment drive will take time, and newly qualified Probation Officers will require that time to develop and improve their practice incrementally. The skills of these newly qualified practitioners will be different to those of the previous cohorts trained prior to Covid-19. This is due to the current cohorts having completed their training predominantly whilst working from home during the pandemic and under the Exceptional Delivery Model (EDM).

The lack of consistent 'soft learning' in an office environment may have impacted on their skills and development, and the consequences of this could be felt for years to come. In terms of long-term challenges, this risks producing a generation of Probation Officers who are limited in some areas, potentially running in parallel to experienced staff leaving because of the emotional toll of yet more upheaval.

Whilst it is positive that HMPPS is recruiting more probation trainees to address staffing shortages, there is some concern that in some areas, trainees will outnumber experienced Probation Practitioners (HMIP, 2021). This could contribute to burnout due to less support being available to trainees in terms of both development of their practice and opportunities to reflect with experienced practitioners. In response to this, the organisation needs to put provisions in place to enhance the immediate post qualification period for newly recruited Probation Officers. This would support the development of their resilience and ensure that they are afforded the opportunity to consolidate their learning incrementally to guard against exiting the organisation prematurely. The celebratory mood to mark unification is of course welcomed, but it needs to be acknowledged that practitioners are tired of reorganisation. In our experience, staff want to make a difference for the people that they supervise. In order to do this, the Probation Service must consider the emotional impact of further change on staff, allow practitioners time to process the learning required to work with a blended caseload and recognise that the substantial recruitment of trainee Probation Officers is not an immediate solution to a long-term problem. Unification is an important milestone in the evolution of the Probation Service and a step in the right direction to deliver better outcomes for the public and the people who we supervise. Real transformation is, however, a long-term commitment, and unification is just the beginning of that journey (Russell cited in HMIP, 2021).

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A person is seen from behind, standing in a large, dark space filled with a dense grid of bright blue, glowing lights. The lights form a perspective that recedes into the distance, creating a sense of depth and immersion. The person is wearing a dark, textured jacket and pants. The overall atmosphere is futuristic and digital.

## Do digital programmes work with individuals that have committed offences?

Jonathan Hussey, Operations Director, Red Snapper Managed Services (part of the Red Snapper Group) - reports on the results of The Intervention Hub digital intervention being used on 10,000 people with lived experience of the CJS.

The COVID-19 pandemic has driven a growing interest in using digital interventions. This may be due to a variety of reasons including:

1. the ability to maintain social distancing during delivery.
2. the ability to continue to offer a consistent service.
3. they can be cost effective.

Moreover, there is a growing body of research showing effectiveness when working with the general (i.e. non-offending) population. For example, research directly comparing Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CCBT) with face-to-face Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) indicates that CCBT can be as effective as conventional CBT, with no statistically significant difference between the two (Andersson & Cuijpers, 2009). Bishop (2020) found that interventions delivered via digital means can improve access among young people, that anonymity facilitates private access to support which minimises stigma, as well as affording benefits such as being available without travel, restrictions or waiting lists. In addition, digital interventions can be cost and resource effective and empower individuals to address their own needs. More recently, we have seen digital methods being used successfully to complement supervision and programme delivery in a pilot of the 'Skills for Relationships Toolkit', and inclusion of such Probation Practitioner toolkits within the Target Operating Model of the new unified Probation Service (Morris 2021). The question is, however, whether digital interventions are effective in addressing offending behaviour.



**Jonathan Hussey**  
Operations Director  
Red Snapper Managed Services

As of August 2021, Red Snapper Managed Services (RSMS) has provided digital interventions via the [Intervention Hub](#) to over 10,000 people with lived experience of the CJS in the U.K. The Intervention Hub programmes can be used as a self-help tool or within a professional relationship during one-to-one supervision. Additionally, they can be used on any device such as smartphones, computers, games consoles and internet-enabled televisions. The content of the Intervention Hubs is based on the cognitive behavioural model although they are also informed by other relevant theoretical perspectives where relevant.

The Intervention Hub hosts a series of 19 programmes including:

1. The Thinking Skills Hub
2. The Victim Awareness Hub
3. The Domestic Abuse Hub
4. The Cannabis Awareness Hub
5. The Emotional Wellbeing Hub
6. The Anger Management Hub
7. The Alcohol Awareness Hub
8. The Women's Programme Hub
9. The Youth Programme Hub
10. The Education and Employment Hub
11. The Strength Based Hub
12. The Avatar Hub
13. The Shoplifting Hub
14. The Thinking Skills (Strength Based) Hub
15. The Female Domestic Abuse (Strength Based) Hub
16. The Emotional Wellbeing (Strength Based) Hub
17. The Cannabis Awareness (Strength Based) Hub
18. The Anger Management (Strength Based) Hub
19. The Substance Misuse Hub.

The sheer volume of people that have used the Intervention Hub means that this is the largest known sample of people with lived experience of the CJS to have used digital interventions.

The results of RSMS research provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence including feedback from people with lived experience of the CJS and professionals.

An overview of the quantitative research shows that:

- 76% of people with lived experience of the CJS showed a positive change in their thinking and attitudes (using pre and post questionnaires);
- 50% completed a programme on their own;
- 86% of people with lived experience of the CJS would recommend them and found it useful;
- 96% of professionals said they believed that the hub helped their people with lived experience of the CJS.

Qualitative feedback indicates:

- The courses are clear, concise and informative and the people with lived experience of the CJS find them easy to access and helpful, individuals have been

happy to complete these by themselves, then discuss afterwards;

- As the people with lived experience of the CJS can undertake the work at home which is a huge benefit when access to the office has been restricted (e.g. COVID), the work can then be reviewed together;
- Some people with learning difficulties would find it difficult completing alone;
- Digital programmes have been brilliant for cases who are isolating;
- The programmes generate a summary of areas that need further work which helps for future intervention planning;
- Some people found the language complicated at times for young age groups;
- Resources such as these allow Officers to work flexibly and efficiently, alleviating some of the pressures around delivering a quality and effective intervention during the pandemic. The platform is reliable and compliments remote supervision of offenders. It affords remote delivery of intervention which allows reflective space for those who struggle with literacy or interpersonal skills, allowing them to complete the work at their own speed and in a comfortable and familiar environment. The report provided upon completion allows Officers to review work that has been completed and challenge accordingly;

- People could “race” through the programmes if they did it alone;
- The activities are not overwhelming and the mix between being able to listen to the questions or read them is helping with concentration;
- One subscribing Police Force stated ‘It provides us with a targeted intervention as part of our diversionary scheme’.

There are limitations to this evidence. As a private company, RSMS does not hold personal identifiable data of people with lived experience of the CJS and to date we have not been able to conduct a longitudinal study on whether completion of a programme is correlated with a reduction in reoffending. From a theoretical perspective, a positive shift in thinking and attitudes has the potential to impact on the resultant behaviour but this is not enough to demonstrate a substantive link with reduced reoffending. The conclusion drawn by Webster (2021) around the potential for digital interventions to extend the reach of desistance-focused messaging to a broader audience in all criminal justice settings is perhaps an inevitable progression and certainly a vision RSMS share. We would argue that digital interventions have huge benefits, for example:

- They can be completed in a relatively short period of time compared to other longer interventions;
- They have measurable outcomes;
- They provide structure;
- They can be delivered in a number of different formats;
- They can be engaging and contain content which is suitable for various learning styles.

That said, there are a number of important limitations. For example:

- You need to be able to commit yourself to the whole process from start to finish;
- It often requires individuals to do extra work outside of sessions;

- It is not always appropriate for people with more complex needs.

So, do digital interventions work? Our data suggest that digital interventions can be effective for low-medium risk service users.

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